

I Know Your Works

Jesus Christ's Words To His People

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I dare say that most of us have one skill or talent that we can be considered an expert on; or, at least, experienced enough to be able to tell good from bad in that particular area. Many of us have enough understanding of music, for example, to differentiate between a good offering of a certain musical genre and a piece from a mediocre, or absolutely awful source.

A lot of Americans do this with sports performances, too. Do not we all become experts every two years judging either the ice skating, or the gymnastics at the Olympics? "Oh! Look! She did a double Salchow! That was just awful! It should have been a triple!"

We know that we are becoming skilled in a certain area when we can begin to be able to distinguish the work of an individual from another individual's efforts.

For instance, classical music aficionados can often guess the composer from just a very short snippet of a piece. For those of you who listen to classical music, after a while your ear becomes attuned to the certain things that they do, and you can tell Brahms from Mozart without any problem. You do not even have to look at the program, or the liner notes. You know exactly who it is.

Art lovers can see the distinctive style differences of Renoir as compared to Monet. Even though both are impressionists, they know their subjects. They know what they like. They know the different ways that they work with light and color. Monet, I think, liked to paint haystacks. So if you see a haystack, it is probably Monet.

Likewise, readers of the great poets know the rhythm and the meter of their favorite authors. They can recognize representative samples with ease. They can tell a Robert Frost from a Lord Byron, or a Steinbeck from a Hemingway. That one is easy. He writes, "dog...ran...out...", and then he starts another three word sentence, and then another—very short, crisp sentences. But, after a while, you begin to know one from another.

Now, some people's work that they do everyday has a similar stylistic, artistic, or quality reputation. Certain craftsmen are known for their work, the fine appointments put into their work, or the extra mile detail.

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In a broader sense, for instance, the company that makes Rolls Royce automobiles is known as the world's most durable and highest quality automobile makers in the world. They have held that title for a very long time, until some of the Japanese automakers began copying their work.

We do this in our office. We have decided to buy all IBM machines for our computing needs because we have found that their quality and durability are worth the extra money at the initial outset.

Maytag has a reputation among appliance makers for the same reasons.

Now the question is, could that be said of us as individuals? Of what quality is our work? Much more importantly, of what quality is our works? Are our works distinctive enough to be recognized as ours? If somebody saw you do something, would they say, "Yeah! That is typical of what he or she does."

Do our works have a reputation for quality, or is it for mediocrity? Is it for putting your most and best into it? Or is it for half-hearted, slipshod work?

If you will remember my sermon, "Building on the Foundation" (Tape #682, August 28, 2004), I showed that our choices determine the quality of our works, whether they are gold, or silver, or costly stone, wood, hay, or stubble. But, who judges their quality?

Our Savior, and High Priest who is called the Judge of All, Jesus Christ, makes that call. What does He say about our works?

In the letters to the seven churches, in Revelation 2 and 3, He gives each church an evaluation. And this evaluation begins with its works. I do not know if you are aware of it (you might have seen this as we were going through it with Mark Schindler just a few moments ago [in "The Highway of Holiness"]), but to every church He says, "I know your works..." Then He gives them an evaluation.

This afternoon, I would like to see (and I hope that you would like to see as well) if any of, or several of these appraisals apply to us. Do we fit any of these categories? Do we fit any of these general judgments on these groups?

Now, before going into Revelation, I want to review just for a moment what works are. First, I would like to go over the words that the Old Testament and New Testament have translated into our English word "works." In the Hebrew of the Old Testament, the chief word used is *ma'aseh*; it means, generally, "an action (good or bad); a transaction

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(buying or selling); an activity; or the product of some action."

It can be a behavior, practice, pursuit, an undertaking, an enterprise, labor, business, a deed, an achievement, an occupation, a doing, an operation.

I would like to go through a few examples in the Old Testament just to give you an idea of how it is used. I want to let you see it in context of its use. (If you know your chapters, you will know that Exodus 23 is the part of the old covenant given just after the 10 Commandments on Mount Sinai.)

Exodus 23:24 You shall not bow down to their gods [Meaning the people of the land.] nor serve them, nor do according to their works [This is *ma'aseh*.] but you shall utterly overthrow them and completely break down their sacred pillars.

This is specifically speaking here about their works in a religious sense; things that they did that their religion caused them to do.

Now, II Kings 23:19 takes place during the reign of Josiah, one of the best kings of Judah. The chronicler states:

II Kings 23:19 Now Josiah also took away all the shrines of the high places that were in the cities of Samaria, which the kings of Israel had made to provoke the LORD to anger; and he did to them according to all the deeds he had done in Bethel.

So, there it is: "Deeds that he had done in Bethel." These were his acts.

This is in the middle of a prayer that Ezra gives because of the problems that were happening there in Jerusalem after the return of the exiles:

Ezra 9:13 And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, since You our God have punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and have given us such deliverance as this. . .

Now, the word is deeds. It has an evil sense to it in this case—all the sins of Judah that had come upon them, and had brought them to this point.

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I just want you to get the sense of what *ma'aseh* means, and how it is used in Isaiah 32:

Isaiah 32:17 The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever.

The word work is in this case the work of righteousness as opposed to the evil deeds in the passage we just read in Ezra.

The next scripture comes after that very famous section about "God's arm not being too short, but your iniquities have separated you from God."

Isaiah 59:6 Their webs will not become garments, nor will they cover themselves with their works; their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands.

It is used three different times as works, and again it is negative—*their works of iniquity*.

Alright, now to Jonah 3:10. This is the result of the fast:

Jonah 3:10 Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.

Here, their works were the fasting, and the repentance that they did at the preaching of Jonah at Nineveh. God saw it, and He turned away His punishment.

This one, in Haggai 2, is a bit tricky, but I think you will see it.

Haggai 2:17 I struck you with blight and mildew and hail in all the labors of your hands; yet you did not turn to Me,' says the LORD.

The word is labors. It is used in a general sense, not necessarily of works as we think of them, but in just about everything that they did. They would go out, and plow the fields, and plant their crops, and God would strike them in those labors.

So, I think that we can see from the few scriptures that I looked at here with you, that

the word is very general. It runs the gamut. You have to find out its meaning from the context.

There are a few other Hebrew words for work or works. But, they are all similar in meaning to *ma'aseh*. They all mean labor in one way or another. But, they may emphasize a certain specific aspect, such as the wages or recompense one receives from his labor. Some mean specific things like, "to plow" or "to engrave." Another one is "to serve"—like a servant would serve a meal; also "to write," "to make war," "to bear fruit," "to make or create something." So, in sum, the Hebrew words all mean: acting, behaving, doing, producing, working—labor. They are all very general.

The same thing happens in the New Testament. More of you might be aware of this word. The chief word in the New Testament for works is *ergon*. This is the general and common Greek word for work. It is the equivalent to *ma'aseh*. And if you go to Thayer's Lexicon, or Strong's Concordance, you will get a definition like this: "Work; business; employment; task; deed; act; product; accomplishment." It sounds like they could have switched it with *ma'aseh*. It is the same type of word.

Most of the other New Testament words for works are cognates of *ergon*. There are a few exceptions to that, one of which is *kopos* meaning "toil, or labor." Another one is *poiesis* and it means "deed; a doing." Then, *ginomai* means "to become." And then, *praxis*, is a deed or an action in progress. I believe that our English word practice comes from this word. Not a done deed, but one that is still in progress.

Now, let us go through some examples of *ergon*, so that we can get the New Testament flavor of this.

John 3:19-21 And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

The word *ergon* has been translated here as deeds—things that you do.

In John 6:29, *ergon* is translated as work.

John 6:29 Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that

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you believe in Him whom He sent."

So God *ergons* too; God works, and this is the work that He does to bring us to believe in his Son.

Romans 3:27-28 Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.

It was translated as works in verse 27, and as deeds in verse 28. And so here it is—a very theological argument that Paul is making, and he uses this general word twice. The translators decided to use two different words—works and deeds.

I Timothy 5:9 is the section on honoring true widows.

I Timothy 5:9-10 Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man, well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work.

Here Paul defines some of the good works one should look for to see who a true widow is. Paul is trying to get the Hebrew Christians stirred up, and he writes to them:

Hebrews 6:10 For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

Their work was to serve one another; theirs was the labor of love toward one another.

And finally, in Revelation 16:11, it is translated deeds again. This is after the fifth vial, or bowl of God's wrath, has been poured out.

Revelation 16:11 They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds [their actions, their behaviors].

We have gone to a lot of scriptures in both the Old Testament, and New Testament. We have seen the wide spectrum of these words used in the Bible for works, and I can only conclude that the idea of works in our modern times has been made overly complicated by theology, because we have seen the proof from the Bible. Sure it is only a handful of scriptures, but what I think we have seen is representative enough to get us to conclude that works are simply deeds, behaviors, practices, endeavors, actions.

Our works are what we *do*. It can be that simple. Our works are how we live, whether righteously, or unrighteously. The context tells you which it is. It is really that simple when you get to the core of it.

Now, I do not mean to oversimplify this, but even the works of the law (like we saw there in Romans) versus faith—all those arguments that Protestants have such a hard time with from Paul's epistles, and the book of James, and some other places in the Bible—can be understood on this basic level:

Works are what we do. Works are how we live. Works are what we practice in our lives.

We are not justified by what we do. Our deeds are not going to get us into God's good graces. That is the part of grace by faith. That is very simple.

We often read Ephesians 2:8-10 and I think that it is worth reading again. Just knowing this—as much as we have gone through so far today—these three verses are very simple to understand.

Why did Luther and Calvin, and all those others make such a big stink about it? It is so plain! Paul was not writing something here that was hard to understand. Their problem was that they did not want to do the work! So, they got rid of it, and made it very difficult for millions of people who are trying to understand the truth of God.

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God. . .

God does that part. And, He even gives us the faith that we need. Simple!

Ephesians 2:9 . . . not of works, lest anyone should boast.

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It is not what we do. We did not deserve it. We just saw that in Ezra. He said that He did not give us what we deserved! And certainly no man has done works worthy of grace! God gives us that.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are His workmanship. . .

God is creating us (doing something with us, molding, shaping)—that is what it means. He is making something of us.

Ephesians 2:10 . . . created in Christ Jesus for good works. . .

Very simple! We are God's workmanship, and He is doing this *in* Christ Jesus. We are in Christ, and Christ is in us. He is doing this in a spiritual way through His Spirit under the headship of Jesus Christ. Let us go on:

Ephesians 2:10 . . . for good works . . .

Is not that easy to grasp? He is creating us, with Jesus in the mix, so that we will do good works.

Ephesians 2:10 . . . which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

That sounds like what my dad was saying this morning—that these things have been arranged since the foundation of the world. He is preparing us to do good works so that He can put us into the place where He wants us to do those good works. And He has prepared everything so that His purpose will come out the way that He has planned it from the very beginning.

Those are not hard verses to understand. There have been thousands of volumes written about verses like this throughout the New Testament, and all they are doing is confusing the issue. It is pretty simple. We do not need to get caught up in the theology of it—all the mumbo jumbo. Just cut right through it to the basic meanings, and the real meaning comes out. It is very simple.

So, it says that we have been created anew in Christ for the purpose of good (godly or

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excellent) works—behaviors, deeds, practices, and way of life. That is all it means.

Now, in Revelation 2 and 3, the meaning is the same when He says, "I know your works..." He means, "I am aware of what you are doing! I have kept track of your deeds! I know the record of your behavior! I can see what you have accomplished!" That is what He is saying. "I have looked over everything you have done, and I can recite back to you the things that you have done. I have judged those works." That is all that He is saying.

In Revelation 2 and 3, He often starts with something good. He knows our psychology. He knows that He needs to build us up a little bit before He tears us down and tells us where we need to go. But, He usually starts with something good, and then He moves on to our deficiencies to get us to repent—gives us areas that need improvement.

Just thinking about the Reformation, and all the rigamarole that has come out of that, as far as grace and works go, it is very interesting that Revelation 2 and 3 deal so much with works! It shows our Savior concerned about the actions, behaviors, deeds, and the accomplishments of His people. It makes an interesting study just to go through the book of Revelation and look for all these places where He talks about what we do. He wants to see if we live as we profess to believe. The proof is in the pudding, is it not?

Protestants would have us believe, according to their doctrine of grace, that our works do not matter. But, they do matter! And they matter to the Only One who counts! And, that is the Judge, Jesus Christ!

So, as we near the end, our works become even more important because they show—not tell (it is not verbal, it is action)—where we stand. God wants to know. And the only way that He can be sure is by seeing us live His way.

All of us could tell Him, "We have been good little boys (or, girls)," but that means nothing. I have had little boys and a girl. I know that saying does not mean anything. You have got to see what they do. If you tell them to make their beds, normally you do not just assume that they made their bed, but you go down the hall and you peek into their room to make sure that they made their beds. God is raising children!

We can tell Him all that we have studied, what we have done for this widow and what we have done for that orphan, but, He knows our deeds. The proof is in whether we have actually done them or not. We can tell the minister, or we can tell our friends at church that we study every morning for 30 minutes, but do we? God knows. He knows our works.

Do we hold the door open for the ladies? Or do we just profess to do so? Do we keep the Ten Commandments? Or do we just say that we do, and give lip service to them? God knows our works. He knows whether we are just Sabbath Christians, or whether we are seven days a week, twelve months a year, 365 day a year Christians. He knows our works.

And, you know, He did this to the father of the faithful as well. He took him to the edge. Abraham had to raise the knife, and then God said, "Now I know your works. Now I know that I am the only True God to you. Now I know that you will obey Me to the *n*th degree."

And He is going to do the same thing for us. He is going to test us in the same way that He tested Abraham. And in the same way that He tested His own Son. Jesus was not play acting when He fell down in the garden of Gethsemane and said, "Father, please take this cup from Me!" But, He proved it by His works.

He gave Himself for us, and for the whole world with an awesome *ergon* that will never be matched. Likewise, our ultimate test is coming as the end approaches.

The letters in Revelation 2 and 3 are study materials to help us pass our tests. They reveal areas where we can easily fail. We lack the time today to study these in any detail, but we can get the sense of Jesus' commendation and criticism of the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3, and perhaps cull what applies to each one of us. So, we are going to go through these seven.

I have tried to look at these verses with fresh eyes, and I have given each one of these churches a nickname. In a way, it is caricature of them, because it certainly is not going to be exactly what they are. It is not going to say everything about them, but if we are going to try to remember what the overall lesson of each letter is, maybe this will help them to stick in your mind. So each one of these has either one or two nicknames that I have given them, just as a device to help us to remember them a little bit to help grab the main point.

Revelation 2:2-6 I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lamp stand

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from its place—unless you repent. But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

I am going to be leaving out the introduction and the conclusion on most of these. We are just going to read the meat of it.

Now, the Ephesians I have called "Crusty Old Soldiers." Or, if you do not like that one, I have also called them "The Dragon Slayers."

This church receives a lengthy commendation for the things that they had done for their painful toils in getting the church started amidst a great deal of deception, controversy, persecution, and upheaval during the first century. There were a great many martyrdoms that took place. The apostles were going everywhere, doing all their preaching. Oftentimes, an apostle such as the apostle Paul would go into an area, start a church, leave an elder there, and move on. He may not come back for several years.

And so they had to be a strong church. They were just fledgling members of the church when the apostle would leave them, and they had to fight all these battles seemingly alone in their separate churches everywhere. They did a pretty good job, overall. That is why this commendation is so good.

So they score high marks in steadfast endurance. It is written twice or three times within those verses I just read. And they were highly intolerant of heresy, at least according to this. For the ones who were really with it, they were very much against these foreign ideas that were coming into the church, and they fought them tooth and toenail.

And so, Jesus says, "I love this about you guys!" This is where the Crusty Old Soldiers come in. They were fighters. If someone came up against the church, they rose up *en mass* and they did what they needed to do to get the invader out.

If you just consider the response of the Corinthian church, though they were carnal, they did what the apostle Paul recommended that they do. And they ended up becoming a stronger church for it.

So, they had this reputation, then, for being very staunch in fighting the heresy that was coming into the church. They were sticklers for orthodoxy. They were defenders of the faith, you might say. If one would warn, "There be monsters here," they would be the first in line to go fight them—"to go slay the dragon!" However, Jesus' criticizes them after commending them for this. And, He criticizes them for leaving their first love—for

departing from their original devotion.

Now the language that is used in verse 4, "that you have left your first love" is the language of divorce. "You have divorced yourself from that former intimate relationship." And what He is saying here is that they are divorcing themselves from Him. He illustrates this in another way. Like a fall from a very high place, from a prestigious position, or a state of prestige, honor, or eminence.

All the battles that they fought for the truth, and for right, had made them hard and scarred and marred, like grizzled old drill sergeants.

Friedrich Nietschze said one time, "Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster."

Jesus liked them better when they were innocent, yielding, childlike, humble, and teachable. Now he has to get through the thick hide that has become their armor. And He says, "I do not like that. I liked it better when you were soft and approachable, and when that sword was not trying to take My head off."

He tells them to remember how they were as Christians before the doctrinal wars; to change their ways, and to return to their former loving deeds of service toward one another, and to God.

He wants them to stop being so defensive about things all the time, and to stop looking for the boogie man under the bed! Put some trust in Him to take care of the church of God; take off their armor, not the armor of God in Ephesians 6—I am talking about the armor that they placed on themselves. What this armor has done is to separate them from each other and God. It put a wall between them, their fellows, and God. They developed a hard outer shell that no one could get through, because they were always looking for something to fight. They are like crabs that have put a big shell over themselves. And, God wants them to soften their heart so that they can love again.

"Get back to your first love," He says. He wants them to stop warring and fighting, and He wants them to simply live His way of outgoing concern once again. The stakes are high because He says, "If you do not do this, I am going to remove your candlestick."

They could get to the point where they are so hard and calloused, that He cannot work with them any more. They are not in a good position. Even though all that they had done is remembered, they need to soften up the heart which has become hard and calloused through the wars.

On to Smyrna:

Revelation 2:9-10 I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Smyrna is the only church with not even a hint of criticism. They are spiritually rich, faithful people. As far as we can tell, they are doing just about everything right.

Oh! To be a Smyrnan, right? Well, maybe not. My nickname for them is "Sheep to the Slaughter."

Smyrnans are beset on every side. They are poor—physically poor. They do not have much. They suffer tribulation almost constantly. Hypocrites who speak evil of them and/or of God surround them. Many of them experience very strong persecution, and some will even face martyrdom. I would dare say that a higher percentage of Smyrnans become martyrs than any other church of God.

Their lives, just from what Jesus says here, seem like one long trial.

I do not think very many of us are Smyrnans. I do not know if I should say that I hope we are or not, because who, really, wants to become a martyr? Who wants to suffer persecution? Who wants to face trial, after trial, after trial, until the point that you just do not have any more strength; and you die? But, that is what God has laid in front of the Smyrnans.

Even after many years in the church of God, many of us have been here for 20, 30, 40 or more years, and too often, I think, we melt as soon as the heat is turned up even just a little bit. Have our great many years in the church of God made us that much stronger and able to deal as these Smyrnans seem to be able to deal with the pressure?

We seem to go to pieces if things do not go our way all the time. I mean, maybe we did not get our reservations quite the way that we wanted them. I think many of us have learned to deal with that, but some people do not. That is not even persecution. That is just a mistake—a failure to communicate. The failure of some clerk to read the line that says that you wanted a connecting room, or what have you.

We should be able to deal with things. And evidently these Smyrnans can, and do. To be a Smyrnan we have to be made of sterner stuff on the inside. We have to have that backbone of steel, with a heart of gold. We have to be able to be willing to take anything that life, Satan, men, or God decide to throw at us; and never compromise one bit.

While the Ephesians fight, and become hardened, and fall from their former high state, the Smyrnans submit to God's will for them, in faith, and they conquer.

I did not say that the Ephesians conquered. I said that the Smyrnans conquered. Like their Savior, they go, as sheep, to the slaughter.

On to Pergamos:

Revelation 2:13-15 I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

The nickname that I have given to the people of Pergamos is, "Spiritual Descendants of Lot." Lot was a righteous man who lived in Sodom. I have also called them, "Cultural Compromisers."

The church of God in Pergamos is a mixed bag. They are commended for clinging to Christ's name, and not denying the faith, even in the face of persecution. They do not try to hide the fact that they are Christians—they hold fast to His name. They were not trying to be secretive about their religion in any way. They held fast to it. They had not repudiated what they were taught. So far, so good.

However, they have one huge problem, and that is where they are. The society around them is totally corrupt. In the verses here, it is Satanic. They lived right where Satan's throne is—right in the midst of all that anti-God, anti-Christ activity. Such a corrupt culture has made them tolerant of sin, much like Lot tolerated the sin of Sodom; much as the Corinthians tolerated the sins of Corinth, and even let some of them into the church there.

To the point, it says here, that they allow idolatry, and sexual immorality to be practiced among them; they are a tolerant church. They are compromisers with the culture.

Now, what about this, "the doctrine of Balaam"? If you will remember, what Balaam did was to trick the Israelites. This trick was a ruse inspired by Satan to keep God's people from entering the Promised Land (right there on the edge of the Promised Land)! They were not very far away from going in. Remember, they were in Moab. Moses pretty much just needed to die, and they were going to cross right over the Jordan. But, Satan had other ideas, and I am sure that God allowed this in order to test Israel. So Balaam did this trick: he used sex to distract Israel into worshipping other gods.

And that is what you have here in verse 14, "to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality." That, in combination with Nicolaitanism: the basic disregard for physical behavior, because "the physical means nothing to true spirituality." As far as the Gnostics were concerned, they did not believe that the deeds done in the body could affect the spirit. The spirit was all important.

One sect of the Nicolaitans went to asceticism, where they denied the body, and the other sect of the Nicolaitans gave the body whatever it lusted after. So, we have these two polar opposites: either give the body nothing, or give the body everything.

Now, when you put these two together, the doctrine of Balaam, and Nicolaitanism, it means their problem is their tolerance of sins of the flesh were leading them to not so obvious sins of the spirit. They were having trouble seeing the problems with these physical sins, and then seeing the effect that it was having on their relationship with Jesus Christ.

He commends Antipas in verse 13. I have always wondered about him. He is an unknown figure in the Bible. It is just his name. Maybe that is all that God wanted us to know about him. Do you know what Antipas means? You remember what anti is? Anti means against; *pas* is Greek for everything, or all; so, Antipas means against everything, or all.

This man 'against all' was a faithful witness before God and before the people. What I think that Jesus is suggesting to the people of Pergamos is that to be faithful to Him as a witness, we need to be against all sin, and not to be tolerant of this one, or that one, which the culture has convinced us is OK. The one who is against all sin was the faithful witness who is commended.

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So, are you against all sin? Or, have you decided that certain things are acceptable?

Pergamos might say, "You do not want to stick out like a sore thumb do you? Look at all these folks having all their jollies around Satan's throne! It would be OK to go with them just a little bit, don't you think?"

But, not Antipas! He was against all that stuff! He stood out like a sore thumb. And he got whacked for it. Remember, the tallest nail gets smashed down first! This is what God says the people of Pergamos are going to have to do. They are going to have to stand out like a sore thumb, and repent.

On to Thyatira:

Revelation 2:19-24 I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works. Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden.

The nickname that I have given to Thyatiran church is, "Married to the Enemy." Or, more generally, "Worldly Christians."

The Thyatirans are commended quite heartily in verse 19 for their love, service, faith, and steadfast endurance. And beyond that, they grew in these areas over the years. It says that their last works were better than their first! So, they were doing something right. I mean, those are good things! Love, service, faith, patience! That is good! It is not bad at all!

However, the debit side of the ledger side is as bad as the credit side is good. Their primary problem is allowing Jezebel, as He calls her here, to teach and deceive God's people. It says, "teach and beguile my servants to commit sexual immorality, and to eat

things sacrificed to idols."

In the Old Testament, Jezebel was Ahab's wife and queen. She was the daughter of the King of Sidon. They also made a political alliance. So, she became the wife of King Ahab of Israel. And what she represents here in general terms is alliance with idolatrous foreigners. She was outside the covenant. For one thing, she was not an Israelite. She was on the other side; she practiced the worship of Baal and Ashteroth. So, she was an idolatrous foreigner with whom the kingdom of Israel had made a political, marital alliance.

The text of verse 20 literally reads, "your wife Jezebel." The church in this area had made an idolatrous foreign alliance. This alliance was as close as a marriage—intimate. That is why Jesus goes on and on here about the things that He is going to have to do to break them out of it. His judgment is very severe on this church.

This strongly suggests that this church had become bedfellows with false churches, and false ministers, and had given these false churches free reign to deceive the brethren. I am just looking symbolically, and am not trying to attach names and faces to these things, except in a general sense.

Now, what about sexual immorality and eating things sacrificed to idols in a spiritual sense? I think that this is interesting. We all know what sexual immorality means in a spiritual sense, do we not? Throughout the Bible the idea is that sexual immorality is a type, especially in a marriage, of idolatry—a breaking of that covenant vow that a husband and a wife make to each other.

So, that one is kind of easy to see. This alliance with this false church or ministers have made them idolaters. But, what about eating things sacrificed to idols? That I think is very interesting. "Made the people eat things sacrificed to idols."

What is "eating" in a spiritual sense? (We had a big, long series on this: Maintaining Good Health, parts 1 through 14, beginning in July 2000.) Eating is what you ingest. And so, spiritually it is the teaching and doctrines we allow ourselves to listen to, and try to understand—it goes through that process where it enters our minds, and we evaluate it one way or another. What Jesus is saying is that it has gotten to the point where we are not watching or looking at the source of what we are ingesting into our minds.

Remember, He says, "eating things sacrificed to idols." So, we are talking about words here—ideas—ideas that have been sacrificed to idols. Think about that.

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What conclusion can we draw? Is there a spiritual counter part to that? Could it possibly be reading materials and listening to tapes that have been made in the name of another god—such as materials put together to teach the trinity? Possibly? Just let that sink in.

This church has gone so far as to allow the materials that were produced for another religion to come into their fellowship, circulate and be taught—sending them right into idolatry.

I think this happened about 15 years ago in the Worldwide Church of God. The Tkachs, Mike Feazell, and others let Jezebel right into the church of God. And, they began to allow the church members to eat things sacrificed to idols. They preached it themselves. And how many in that church are now idolaters in God's eyes? Bowing to another god?

Notice what God says, "I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death [basically disease], and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts."

So, the works of this church of God (this corrupt church) are tainted with syncretism—a mixture of good and bad. As James puts it, "they are a spring that issues both fresh and salt water" and this should not be, brethren.

They have eaten heavily of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. They have one foot still firmly planted in the world, and it shows. They do not want to commit themselves 100% to God.

That is why I call them, "Married to the Enemy." They have allowed the enemy right inside the church. And they are fine with it. And God says that the wake-up call is not going to be pleasant.

Now, on to Sardis:

Revelation 3:1-4 I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect [complete, or mature] before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their

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garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.

There is that word worthy again! They have qualified.

That Sardis has a mere handful of members who are living righteously is Christ's only commendation. That is the only good thing that He has to say to this church—there are a few members who are still doing it right. Everything else is criticism in this letter.

So, I have called them, "Dead and Deader," (as in "Dumb and Dumber") or, "The Church of the Living Dead."

His chief criticism is that they have a reputation—a name—that they are alive. But, He knows—He has taken their pulse—they are dead. There is nothing there. They are dead on arrival. They have no zeal. They are lifeless for the most part. Even what remains of the truth or of their zeal is ready to fizzle out.

"Be watchful, and strengthen that which remains that are ready to die." It is like watching their EKG,...blip...blip...blip...they are just barely there. They are asleep at the switch, and not even aware that they need to prepare for the imminent Return of Jesus Christ. That is right in verse 3. "I will come upon you as a thief and you will not know what hour I will come upon you"—because they are dead!

They are asleep. They barely have enough energy to open one eye and see what is happening.

Jesus is trying to get their attention, to let them know that they need to put some effort into becoming righteous. They are not putting any effort into anything. They need to clean up their garments, or bring their works to completion, or maturity; but they are too drowsy with sleep to rouse themselves to any kind of action. They are satisfied with their state. They are living on their past reputation, of having done positive things in the past.

They are unwilling to budge from their comfort zone, because their nice, warm bed in which they are sleeping (and dying) is so much more comfortable than the harsh reality of their state of near death. As well as, the harsh reality of the world, and the way that things have become; and what they need to do to overcome it.

They are in an extremely dangerous situation. Dead Christians are no Christians at all.

Let us go on to Philadelphia:

Revelation 3:8-11 I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.

Like Smyrna, Philadelphia receives no great criticism. If you want to find any, it is there in the phrase, "for you have a little strength." They are weak. They are powerless. They do not have much. It probably means that they do not have much influence or resources—manpower. They are small and weak. They have a hard time getting things done because of those shortcomings.

As Smyrna is poor but spiritually rich, Philadelphia is weak but strong in faith. So, they get a pretty good report. They walk in faith through the door that Christ Himself opens for them. They obey His word and are not ashamed to be known as Christians. They make a good witness for God, and for the church. They also have enough strength to endure through trial.

Their name, Philadelphia, hints that they love and serve their brethren. That is what Philadelphia means: love of the brethren, or the care of the brethren. And for this, Christ simply loves them and protects them throughout tribulation.

They receive a princely reward; the best reward as far as I can tell for all of these seven churches (at least according to what we are told here). They get new names; and they stay with Jesus Christ forever (like Mr. Armstrong said) as His personal team, His advisors.

Philadelphians simply follow God's instruction despite their weak circumstances. It does not look like they complain or ask for more, they just do what they can. Their works are good. Even though they may not be able to fill the world's airwaves with a program, they do what they can with the resources that they have, and they make a witness. They doggedly keep on the path, and they faithfully keep on doing what they have been taught. They hold on tight.

The nickname I have given Philadelphia is, "The Little Engine that Could."

On to Laodicea:

Revelation 3:15-19 I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth [what a terrible thing]. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' —and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

Laodicea has nothing good said about its works—nothing good. The whole letter is criticism from beginning to end. They are neither on fire for God, nor are they against Him. Like bumps on a log, they are just there. They do nothing. Christ finds this very distasteful because this means that they feel nothing for Him. They are neither on fire for Him, nor are they hatefully against Him. They feel nothing. They are apathetic, indifferent, and unresponsive.

My nicknames—two of them—are, "Good for Nothing" and "The Idle Rich."

The word Laodicea means, "Judgment of the People," and that is exactly their problem; they have evaluated **themselves** to be self sufficient, needing nothing—even from God. They have no idea whatsoever what God's judgment of them would be, because they do not care what God thinks. They do not need Him. They have got their riches. They can get along just fine as they are. They are busy doing something else.

Yet, Jesus, the Judge, evaluates them as miserable wretches. It is the total other extreme of what they thought of themselves. They greatly need spiritual riches, righteousness, and vision. Those are the three things that He tells them to get—spiritual riches, righteousness, and vision; the latter one, especially, because their vision was all turned in on themselves. They need to turn it outward and upward, as it were.

They are so hooked upon themselves, and their own gain—the things that they wanted to do—that they were totally blind to everything else that was truly important. He wants them to be useful, but in their present state, they are, as I have said, good for nothing. He could not use them.

He wants them to invite Him into their lives, but they are too busy with their other priorities, and most of these other priorities have to do with me, me, me.

What few works that they do have lack zeal. They are easily and always distracted by their own concerns. They judge their spiritual state by their physical wealth thinking that God has blessed them, when they have actually done it all for themselves. And, their judgment does not come from the standards of Jesus Christ, but from their own self righteousness—what they considered to be important.

They are living in spiritual Never Land; and their Savior is forced to take drastic action to get them to see reality.

To be of Thyatira, Sardis, Laodicea, and Ephesus is to be on the edge. They are the ones that God says need to wake up, smell the coffee, and get to work, because their works before Him stink, or are non-existent. He wants to see in their behavior—in the things that they do for one another, and do in service for God—some of that good work that He has been preparing them for.

I hope that from these descriptions that you may have seen yourself somewhere. I hope that it has been in some of the better churches of God like Smyrna, or Philadelphia, even to be from Pergamos is better than some of the others (Even Lot was called righteous. He had that going for him.).

I also hope that these things have helped you to think about where you fall spiritually. The time of our reward at the Return of Christ is just around the corner. It is just over the horizon. And it is necessary for us to begin to evaluate ourselves as if we had no time at all; to get on track, to get on the stick, to make our works acceptable before God.

Please close with me in Revelation 22:12. (This will bridge the way to my next sermon on the Last Great Day.)

Now is the time to put our spiritual house in order if we want to present ourselves as holy, righteous, and faithful before God; now is the time, while there is still time to put the corresponding works into practice. Jesus says to us:

Revelation 22:12 And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.

Hope you all have a wonderful Feast!